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Using Action Research for Positivist Research

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SYNOPSIS

Recent special issues at major journals have called attention both to action research and research methodology. Results from action research cycles can be quite valuable, addressing both the interests of the researcher and the practitioner, typically viewed through an interpretive lens. In consideration of a largely positivist audience, an innovative, positivist approach to action research is demonstrated. This tutorial: 1) shows positivist researchers how they may do relevant action research; 2) shows action researchers how they may do rigorous positivist research and increase the range of publishing venues; and 3) is generally informational regarding epistemology, methodology, and action research.

Differences between positivist and interpretive epistemologies are clarified as separate from research approach. Action research is a research approach that may be conducted in a positivist way, using theory and carefully worded hypotheses through the typical action research cycles. Multi-methods are recommended to mitigate risks to validity. An interview questionnaire is designed using scale development for quantitative measures as well as open-ended questions. Multi-grounded theory is expanded and used effectively to process the resulting qualitative data.

All evidence is sought, both confirmatory and disconfirmatory. A presentation format for copious data organized by hypotheses is suggested. Triangulation of multi-cycle evidence aids a discussion of theory corroboration, generalization, and alternate explanations. An integrated multi-method, multi-cycle framework and graphical display are recommended.

This tutorial answers the call for action research guidelines, addressing the quality and marketability of action research using positivist epistemology. Perhaps a few more positivists will now make action research their choice.

Keywords

Action Research, Positivist, Epistemology, Multi-grounded theory, Multi-Methodology, Triangulation, Integrative Framework, Guidelines.